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FM AMEMBASSY ASMARA
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INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI
AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

S E C R E T ASMARA 000178

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/EX AND AF/E

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ER](#) [SU](#) [SO](#)

SUBJECT: (SE) ERITREA FEELING THE SQUEEZE ON SOMALIA

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Melinda Tabler-Stone for reason 1.4(d)

¶1. (S) Summary. The Office of the President hastily convened two separate meetings of ambassadors on June 10 to present a white paper on the GSE position on Somalia, according to British Ambassador Andrea Reidy (protect). Reidy attended the second session comprising EU ambassadors and chaired by presidential advisor Yemane Ghebremeskel. Reidy described Yemane as extremely nervous at the prospect that Ethiopia (as the GSE sees it) would succeed in getting strict sanctions imposed on Eritrea and uncomfortable discussing Eritrea's growing predicament with Western diplomats. She told him Eritrea's isolation was its own fault and even its friends were fed up with Eritrea's behavior. End summary.

¶2. (S) Before convening the meeting, Yemane Ghebremeskel pulled Reidy aside to vehemently deny GSE support to al Shabaab and insist the May 20 IGAD vote on sanctioning Eritrea was an unjustified, but unsurprising, attack by Ethiopia. He intimated, however, the GSE had been caught off-guard when Sudan did not mount a defense on Eritrea's behalf. He complained IGAD had not followed proper protocol. (Reidy learned from another source that President Isaias was furious Sudan had voted against Eritrea and angrily berated Sudanese security chief Saleh Gosh on his recent visit to Asmara. Reidy's source believed Sudan's IGAD representative had been completely blindsided and had no voting instructions). Reidy told Ghebremeskel to stop arguing protocol technicalities, that it was Eritrea's fault it was losing friends and that "all of Africa is fed up with you." She told Yemane that by dismissing IGAD, Eritrea had lost its voice in regional affairs and she urged him to rethink how they engage.

¶3. (S) In the larger meeting, Yemane read the position paper aloud and invited comments. Reidy provided a copy of the paper, which has been e-mailed to the desk. The tone is typical of Eritrea's pronouncements on Somalia to date. The GSE asserts a) it is not providing arms or ammunition to any party in Somalia (present tense); b) countries hostile to Eritrea are maneuvering to impose unjust sanctions on Eritrea; c) Ethiopia is arming Islamists in Somali and should be sanctioned; d) Eritrea has a right to its own position on the situation in Somalia; e) other countries should stop imposing their preferred candidates on Somalia and allow the Somalis to own their political process. Reidy said she told the group Eritrea's willingness to engage was a positive development, but that the government must make it clear to the international community that it does not support violence and must call on the insurgents to stop fighting and join the political process.

¶4. (S) Reidy was struck by the absence of Yemane's usual abrasive manner; he seemed unstrung. His handshake was clammy, his eyes glassy, and his hands shook as he read the position paper aloud. He was, she said clearly shaken by the prospect, as the GSE sees it, that Ethiopia would succeed in getting stringent sanctions imposed. She believed Eritrea has finally realized it has alienated everyone.

15. (S) Comment: The GSE continues to blow its one-note horn on its support to al Shabaab, but this meeting is an encouraging sign it's feeling the pressure. Now would be an opportune time to step up the dialogue, but Post recommends this be done quietly, at least in the short-run. Isaias only knows one response to public pressure-punch back-and politically he can't be seen to be knuckling under to Ethiopia or the U.S.

TABLER-STONE